



Strategic Communications Plan 2007 - 2010

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February 27, 2007



table of contents:

introduction:	3
Strategic Communications	3
Primary Function	3
Developing a Communications Framework	3
Communicating the Successes and the Challenges	4
research mechanisms:	5
situational analysis:	5
External Challenges	6
Internal Challenges	7
Opportunities (Internal & External)	7
guiding principles:	8
Mission	8
Vision	8
Division's Primary Goal	8
communications goals:	8
target audiences:	9
Internal	9
External	9
key messages:	10
objectives, strategies & tactics:	11
Internal Communications	11
External Communications	13
Public & Community Relations	18
School Communications	21
monitoring & evaluation:	22
where to go from here:	23
conclusion:	23
sources:	24

introduction:

Strategic Communications

Positive public relations evolve from a well-planned and properly implemented communications program. A successful communications program will enhance public relations by increasing awareness, understanding, trust and support of public education in Prairie Land Regional Division No. 25 (PLRD). The communications function is a key element in developing, implementing and evaluating an effective communications program.

Primary Function

The primary role of the communications function is to work in conjunction with the Board of Trustees and Senior Administration in the planning, initiation and evaluating of an effective communications program for the Division. This program will focus on two-way communication; ensuring timely and accurate information is disseminated to both internal and external publics and is received from both internal and external publics (i.e. finding out what 'they' think).

Developing a Communications Framework

The early stages of the communications function should include introduction to and education of communications, its role and purpose in an organization. As Prairie Land Regional Division moves toward a pro-active strategic positioning, the communications function will evolve from a service provider to a strategic partner. Communications excellence contributes to the efficient use of resources. Integrated communications ensures that initiatives and programs are leveraged across the organization. Working with local media, enhanced web-based communications, and effective internal and external communications strategies all support a proactive communications function.

Initially, communications activities within the Division need to be organized to achieve results over three different time frames:

- **Short-Term** – Focus on issue/event driven communications and follow-through with existing processes. I.e. Newsletter, news releases, media relations, board meeting briefings/highlights.
Status: Already in progress.
- **Mid-Term** – Program or initiative-based pro-active communications that reflect the Divisions' role as a public educator and provider of quality education in a rural setting. I.e. Audit of existing communications material (brochures, newsletter, website), review of established internal/external communications approaches/vehicles, review and enhancement of corporate identity (consistent design of official documents), review and coordination of material for promotional and special events.
Status: Audit portion of this process is complete; 'next steps' need to be determined and prioritized.

- **Long-Term** – Mission and mandate based communications that reflect the objectives and goals that are set by the Board. Preparing a framework and proactive approach to the communications function. I.e. adopting a formal communications plan, prioritizing tactics and establishing realistic timelines, ultimately leading to improved communication with internal and external publics.

Why prepare a communications plan?

- Connects you to corporate goals & priorities
- Gives PLRD a track to run on
- Sets specific targets to aim for
- Provides means to measure progress
- Establishes base for follow-up planning
- Integrates communications initiatives across the organization

Why communications in education?

- In the private sector no one argues about the need to engage in marketing, positioning and communicating.
- In the education sector educators believe their images should build themselves – often with “disappointing results” (Jeremy B. Cato, Communications in Education)

We wonder why the community is up in arms when a school closes, bus routes change, or there is a drastic increase or decrease in classroom sizes. We need to ask ourselves, did we tell them this was coming and how did we tell them?

Communicating the Successes and the Challenges

Communications is needed in education to inform and promote both the positive and the negative issues to both internal and external audiences.

- **Successes** – Communicating both successes in the Division and successes in our schools builds support for PLRD and public education. By promoting PLRD to employees we can communicate positive things about the Division, decreasing employee turnover and illustrating that PLRD is a good employer. By promoting PLRD and public education to those who do not have children in the school system we can communicate why tax dollars are so important for education and the future of our communities.
- **Challenges** – Communicating challenges or negative issues in the division and in our schools is vital. By informing the public, staff and other external audiences, we are able to build trust throughout the Division. We must ensure that we share accurate and timely information so that our audiences are informed and know that they can trust the PLRD name.

Communications program should:

- Strive to win increased community support for education by elevating community support of, and appreciate for, the school system.

- Should be sensitive to public opinion and monitor community attitudes so the Board and administration can analyze and if need be, take action to improve programs and services.
- Communicating successes builds support for PLRD and public education.
- By promoting PLRD to employees we can communicate positive things about the Division, decreasing employee turnover and illustrating that PLRD is a good employer.
- By promoting PLRD and public education to those who don't have children in the school system we can communicate why tax dollars are so important for education and the future of our communities.

research mechanisms:

In preparing to write the communications plan, the Communications Consultant conducted a series of interviews and discussions, as well as a communications audit that entailed a review of current communication activities and materials.

Research mechanisms included:

- Personal interviews with principals, trustees and various department staff.
- Communications survey, completed by principals, trustees, school council members and administration.
- Review of media releases over the past 18 months.
- Review of existing strategic documents, PLRD Three-Year Education Plan, Annual Education Results Report, Utilization Plan, PLRD Advocacy Plan, Jurisdiction Results Report.
- Review of existing print and promotional materials.
- Best Practices Review (meetings with education communication counterparts to discuss their communications processes and plans).

situational analysis:

The goal of the communications plan is to generate strategies to create a better-informed public and form a fundamental appreciation of the value the Division has to its residents.

Division Facts:

- Prairie Land is located in the southeastern part of the province, approximately 2 hours east of Calgary, with its board office located in Hanna.
- There are an estimated 3680 households in the jurisdiction, spread over a sparsely populated 15,500 square kilometers (6,000 square miles).
- Prairie Land is a rural community with strong ties to the agricultural industry.

- There are 18 schools within the Division; eight of these schools are located on the colonies of the Hutterian Brethren and house 137 students.
- The estimated population of students spread between these schools and colonies is 1545.
- Currently, 10 local newspapers cover the Division.

The Prairie Land Regional School Division has seen a steady decline in enrollment of the past five years. Communication needs have increased substantially over the past few years as large distances between communities have increased the need for efficient and effective communications. Additionally, as our Divisions' population declines, the issues grow more complex. In order to remain economically viable, there is a concern that programs may need to be reduced, bus routes eliminated and even schools closed. These options however may create problems associated with distances between schools and the time it takes to transport pupils between centers. The "schools by necessity" component of the new funding framework is of some help where programming is concerned, although it does not address the concerns related to transportation, plant operations and maintenance costs. The division believes that the new funding framework based on per student allocations is inadequate to provide quality learning opportunities for students.

In order to maintain our mandate as an open and transparent school division we will need to frequently and consistently communicate through various media, including print, in-person, and the Internet.

External Challenges

- From 2001 to 2005, Prairie Land experienced a decline in student population that averaged 3.4 per cent in each of those four years. However, in the 2006/2007 school year the Division experienced a 0.98 per cent increase in student population.
- It is predicted that by 2012-13 the enrollment in the school division will be 1470 students.
- The issue of finances has become a major concern for the Division because of this declining enrollment.
- Multi-graded classes are commonplace in the division.
- In our four smaller schools (Altario, Veteran, Berry Creek, Youngstown), 100 per cent of the classes are in a multi-graded environment, with triple-grading being common place.
- In our colony schools, teachers have to teach with up to 8 or 9 grades in a single classroom.
- In recent years, the public has much higher expectation for openness and accountability on the part of the government, which in turn is expected of our Division.
- Ensure that all messages, in all forms of communications, are clear, concise, and consistent from a broad perspective, as well as for specific matters and issues. These key messages should be used consistently and integrated as much as possible into all Division communication products.
- Maintaining transparency - Finding the balance between abiding by the Alberta School Act and avoiding the image of being seen as too bureaucratic and closed.

Internal Challenges

- To ensure Staff morale is a priority and that internal communication objectives are being met.
- Due to geographic constraints communication often doesn't get filtered through the jurisdiction. There are communication gaps present at each school.
- Communication to and from each school or to various internal publics isn't consistent. A formal process needs to be established and maintained.
- Staff and Board need to understand the importance of regular and consistent messages and communications to residents and participate by using the communication tools and vehicles in place (or proposed in this plan).

Opportunities (Internal & External)

- Publicize the efforts and the findings of the Funding Framework Review to demonstrate the Division's commitment to ensuring our students have equitable access to a quality education.
- More focus on internal communication initiatives will enhance morale and will help gain acceptance of staff.
- More education and understanding of the role of public education and its impact on the future of our communities.
- To incorporate communications planning and consultation planning as an integral part of the planning of all significant and potential changes that will impact publics of the Division. This ensures that early involvement and/or communications with internal and external groups is adequate and appropriate.
- Review, develop and implement formal and informal processes to solicit the views and opinions of Division staff and residents on issues, programs, and services.
- Increase communication and feedback to staff and residents on the rationale of Board decisions following consultation processes and input from these groups. Inadequate feedback can cause concerns that the Board has not "heard" the input provided or that it did not "listen to or considered" the input received during the consultation process.
- We can improve existing communication tools that educate our publics and promote a positive image. Tools need to be consistent with the Division's corporate identity.

guiding principles:

Mission

“Upon school completion every student will be successfully prepared to enter the world of work and/or to carry on with post-secondary education.”

Vision

“Small Schools Preparing Students for Big Futures”

Division’s Primary Goal

“Students will develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will prepare them for life after high school. They will have received a good basic education.”

communications goals:

Successful communication strategies need a communication plan focused on results. The plan describes what you are committed to communicating, why, to whom and how.

These communications goals support the strategic and operational goals of the Division and will form the basis of the key messages.

1. Inform – provide timely information to all stakeholders.
2. Increase awareness of current initiatives.
3. Review all communications tools for division and school-based communications.
4. Set standards and policies for Communications, including division logo, website use, publications, advertisement standards and usage.

“The overall goal of the PLRD Board of Trustees is to plan, develop and implement a public information program that will provide effective reciprocal communication with all of the Board’s constituent groups.”

Prairie Land’s supporting communications goals will be to:

- Increase residents understanding of the Boards plans and decisions, and the rationale for those decisions.
- Increase opportunities for residents to provide input into programs, services and decision-making processes.

- Increase Division employees' understanding of policies, programs, services and Board decisions.
- Increase understanding and promotion of the many benefits a rural public education system.

target audiences:

Communication plays two critical roles: informing and promoting; and is directed at two categories of audiences: internal and external.

Internal

- Trustees
- PLRD Staff
 - School Based
 - Professional
 - Support
- Central Office

External

- Students
- Parents/Guardians
- School Councils
- School Volunteers
- Educational Organizations: ASBA, PSBAA
- Alberta Education
- Provincial/Municipal Governments
- Community Partners and Groups (service clubs, David Thompson Health Region)
- Media
- General Public

key messages:

Key messages are vital in ensuring that the division is represented in the desired and consistent manner established.

Key messages must often times be prepared in regard to specific issues. In these situations, the key messages will be developed with input from the Board, Superintendent and other senior administration, as well as the Communications Consultant.

There are some key messages that can be used from time to time in many of our communications. These are the standard messages that, when appropriate, can be utilized, at least in a small way. However, the key to getting a message out is repeat—repeat—repeat. Typically a person has to hear/see 10 impressions of a message for it to have a lasting impact. All messaging needs to be consistent and simple.

- Through its dedicated staff, PLRD delivers quality education.
- Prairie Land Regional Division supports the definition of Alberta Learning regarding “Basic Education” (Ministerial Order No. 004/98).

“A basic education must provide students with a solid core program including language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. Students will be able to meet the provincial graduation requirements and be prepared for entry into the workplace or post-secondary studies. Students will understand personal and community values and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Students will develop the capacity to pursue learning throughout their lives. Students also should have opportunities to learn languages other than English and to attain levels of proficiency and cultural awareness which will help to prepare them for participation in the global economy.”

- Teaching excellence and innovative problem solving is key to PLRD’s success.
- PLRD schools provide safe and caring environments for students.
- PLRD Trustees and Staff are important ambassadors for the Division and should be positive, approachable, available and responsive.
- Even with concerns surrounding enrollment decline, Prairie Land’s students continue to do well academically.
- At PLRD, the business of education is conducted in an honest, impartial and professional manner.
- PLRD is accountable, open and approachable. We listen to and understand the needs of the community.
- PLRD is committed to communicating with residents and involving them in planning for the future.
- The jurisdiction demonstrates effective working relationships with partners and stakeholders.

objectives, strategies & tactics:

Internal Communications

An informed and happy staff member is the best ambassador a Division could have. Studies indicate there are three ways to change the public's attitude towards education and the division:

- Publications and other one-way communications vehicles: three per cent
- Involvement: seven per cent
- Through contact with school staff: 90 per cent

Communications Survey Results

In the winter of 2006, members of the Board, administrative staff, principals and school council chairs were asked to respond to an internal, anonymous survey regarding communication efforts in Prairie Land. According to the results of this survey we're doing a satisfactory job of communicating with our publics. However, the survey also indicates a need for improved internal communications between staff, central office and board. The Survey also indicated that the term 'public' is very general and doesn't speak to the importance of targeting communications initiatives to particular stakeholders both inside and outside of the organization.

Based on the survey results, the following can be extrapolated:

1. The division is doing a good job of making information available to staff; access to various sources is important and should continue in some capacity or another.
2. Employees prefer to receive information regarding district-wide matters through email, memos or formal/informal meetings with the superintendent.
3. Increase frequency and decrease size of communiqués with staff.
4. Design and implement a '*News Brief*' or '*Information Update*' to provide staff with quick, concise information on district-wide matters. The update will be a word template document that can be emailed easily.
5. The website is currently underutilized and could be a valuable communications tool.
6. 'District Annual Report to Communities' should be modified to fit within the graphic standards and layout of 'In Focus'.
7. The division must find a way for schools to share what they are doing with other schools.

Internal Objectives

1. To improve two-way communication.
2. To foster an environment that supports and advances the Division's overall vision, objectives, and creates a climate of openness and inclusiveness.
3. To ensure our staff do not function in isolation of each other and that school specific news and information is shared with the rest of the Division.
4. To promote open two-way communication between PLRD schools and the 'Division' in an effort to more effectively manage public perception.
5. To increase frequency and reduce size of district-wide information dissemination.

Strategy

Enhance current internal communication practices as well as develop the appropriate tools and vehicles to improve upon and enhance current communication practices.

Tactics

Staff Meetings

- Encourage school/Division ambassadorship - talk about PR at staff meetings.
- Encourage staff to respond when they hear questions about the school or Division, even if its simply suggesting those involved to contact or visit the school.
- Work with staff to foster pride in their school and the Division.

Timing: As established in each individual school.

Recognition of special days/weeks

- Throughout the year, the Division should recognize special days/weeks such as World Teachers' Day, Substitute Teachers' Appreciation Week, and Staff Appreciation Week in a variety of ways. Media releases can also be issued to highlight the special day/week.

Timing: Board to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.

School Websites

- Prairie Land Schools are encouraged to create school-specific websites that are accessible from www.plrd.ab.ca.
- School-specific website are an excellent tool for recruiting new staff to your school.
- Create or integrate a CTS module so students are responsible for updating the school site.

Timing: Principals and superintendent to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.

Prairie Land Profiles

- Prairie Land Profiles is an online directory of general information on each school and central office department. In the past, a hard copy was prepared each year, however, in the interests of resource conservation, the profiles have been made available on-line.
- The purpose of Prairie Land Profiles is to grow the division's sense of community. PLRD is spread out over a large geographic area. The profiles are intended to help build a better sense of community throughout the division providing general information on our schools.
- The directory is intended for the use of PLRD staff only and every attempt is made to ensure that the directory is not accessible to the general public.
- School profiles are updated in September of each year. Each school is responsible for updating their schools' profile.

Timing: Annual – September of each school year.
Already in progress, education needs to continue at the school level on 'how' and 'why' so these profiles will continue to be improved and enhanced each year.

Email & Memos

Timing: As needed.
Already well-used communications tool.
Staff prefers to receive communication via these mediums.
Continue work on increasing frequency and decreasing size of communiqués with staff.

Announcements in Schools

Timing: As needed.
As established in each individual school.

Appoint a person to serve as the distribution point for school jurisdiction information.

Timing: ASAP
If already established these distribution channels need to be documented and formalized.

Some of the communications initiatives listed above may already be in use at the school level and/or Divisional level. Although already in use, each of these tactics can be enhanced and/or improved upon while continuing to meet the distinct differences in school size, staffing levels and enrollment numbers.

There are several other communication tools that are targeted at our internal audiences. In most cases, the tools are used to reach out to both internal and external audiences.

These include the following:

- School Websites
- Media releases
- Board meeting reporting
- Agenda Distribution
- Board Highlights Distribution
- Division Website
- Retirement & Years of Service Recognition

External Communications

Individuals are elected to the Board of Trustees by their communities' electorate. The Board is formed of individuals from the public so that each trustee can represent the views of the people in his/her respective communities. The Board must be responsive to the needs of each community while ensuring the educational well-being of the entire division.

In addition to the Board, all PLRD staff also play an important role in external relations.

External Objectives

1. To ensure the residents and publics are aware of and have an understanding of the Division; and
 - a. the important role public education plays in shaping the future of our communities;
 - b. to ensure there are adequate and appropriate opportunities for residents to provide input into District-wide decision-making processes;
 - c. that the Division is approachable and accountable by fostering open communications.

Strategy

Develop and enhance the appropriate communication vehicles, processes, and resources that educate and promote a desirable image, as well as encourage open communications between Board, staff, and residents.

Tactics

Board Highlights

- Shares the important work of the Board with staff, media and the community; it's important for constituents to know and see what you are doing.
- Distribution includes both internal and external publics.

Timing: Twice per month.
In progress, distribution modified January 8, 2007.

Division Newsletter "In Focus"

- Semi-annual distribution includes both internal and external publics.
- *In Focus* is likely the best communications vehicle to reach our residents. This is a relatively new publication thus there are some areas we can enhance; some of these enhancements have already taken place.
- Develop a feedback section to help monitor public opinion and potential issues.

Timing: Twice per year (fall & spring).
In progress; a new initiative first distributed May 2006.

Visual Identity & Branding

- All school boards have an image. That image, however, is not necessarily one cohesive or concise idea. More accurately, a school board's total image consists of a collect of individual perceptions formed in the minds of its community members.
- A brand essentially is an identity that clearly separates one from the competition. An effective brand can create a bond between itself and the consumer by meaning something positive to that person.
- A brand communicates trust – and people are more supportive of a product or service they trust. Respected brands can deflect criticism and achieve goals. A solid brand earns trust through real solutions and allows an organization to deliver the services and messages it wants to convey to its stakeholders.

- From the Boardroom to the stockroom, the impact of brand articulation is critical. Employees and students should be able to sum up the organization in the same key words – with the brand message coming through clearly and consistently, building trusted relationships for everyone’s benefit.
- The goal in updating the identity of PLRD is to demonstrate stronger support of staff and stakeholders through enhanced two-way communications. This includes providing on-line templates for a number of communications products, such as media releases, not only to ensure clear messaging, but also to make the organization’s ability to communicate its positive work more efficient. Having an updated look is just the first step; communicating positive messages to stakeholders is what develops trust in the logo and brand, and therefore – in the abilities of PLRD.
- Logos, colors and messaging are the primary means organizations use to identify themselves and build brand recognition with their target audiences. It is important that PLRD has a consistent visual identity that presents a unified image in order to build trust and loyalty. Whether it is a brochure, poster, newsletter, Web page, display or sign – PLRD’s visual images should be easily identifiable.
- Although a “positive” image depends much on the actions of school board employees, its programs, and its service levels, a consistent brand with set guidelines will enhance and unify the visual image of the Division.

Timing: Board to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.

Website

- The current PLRD website requires additional work, which would entail adding a more progressive design and additional functionality while ensuring our residents without high-speed access can use it. This would include the re-organization and addition of content, new graphic design, the re-construction of pages, on-line surveys, comment sections, and feedback forms (to evaluate and solicit ongoing views and opinions of residents on issues, programs and services).
- There is often a misconception that farmers and ranchers are not on the Internet. A recent Angus Reid survey shows 50 to 60 per cent of farmers across Canada are now on the WWW. It is true that most use dial-up (not high speed), but that is also changing, and quickly, as more rural residents connect to satellite and other rural high-speed providers.
- As farmers adopt the Internet, the entire agri-business sector is coming on-line fast to offer better information, products and services, at the same time, cutting costs and creating new market opportunities. The Internet is quickly becoming the preferred center of business activity for producers.
- If we assume the national statistic is representative of Prairie Land, we can assume at least 50 per cent of our residents are on-line and that the WWW can be a very effective way of communicating to them. In addition, if 50 per cent of our residents have e-mail access, how can we use this as an effective communications vehicle? E-mail alerts, to those residents who subscribe – Opt-In E-mail – could go to an approved e-mail distribution list that would draw residents to new items on the Web site. To date, some schools within the division are already emailing their monthly newsletters home to parents/guardians. As technology evolves, there is the opportunity for continued growth and development in this area.

- In an effort to increase the use of the Division's website by both internal and external stakeholders, the web address should be added to all divisional documents.

Timing: Board to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.

Media Relations

- News Releases, PSA's and interviews with Superintendent and Board Chair.
- Trustees, members of senior administration and school administrators should participate in a media-training workshop provided by an external company. It is proposed that the Board of Trustees commits to ongoing media training to be undertaken in the fall of each election year.
- Invite reporters to special school-based events (arts, culture, guest speakers, fundraisers, awareness programs etc.)
- Send information and photos to local media as they arise.
- Email school newsletters to local media on a regular basis.

Timing: As needed or directed by the Superintendent.
Work should be done to enhance media relations initiatives at the school level.

Promotional Materials

- Fact Sheet
 - Developed for new residents to the Division. Given to families during orientation/ school registration.
 - Distributed to municipal government offices, real estate agents etc.

Timing: Board to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.

- Division Map
 - Developed for new residents to the Division. Given to families during orientation/ school registration.
 - Distributed to municipal government offices, real estate agents etc.
 - To be used in publications such as *In Focus*.

Timing: Board to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.

- Brochure
 - A well-designed brochure can be a very effective tool for introducing the division to external audiences. Brochures usually are used as a first-point of contact and can be distributed via many avenues, including but not limited to: municipal offices, libraries, business offices, realtors, Welcome Wagon (or similar) services, etc.
 - Creating a general brochure that includes information about the entire division, with an insert for each school and/or community, will reduce the frequency in which the brochure will need to be updated and replaced.

Timing: Board to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.

Divisional Calendar

- PLRD produces an annual calendar that is distributed to staff, families and partners across the division. The calendar includes relevant dates such as school holidays, PD Days, Teachers Convention and achievement/diploma exams.
- The popularity and widespread distribution makes the calendar a very effective communications tool.
- To take advantage of this valuable tool, enhancements like calling attention to the PLRD website and the addition of board meeting dates should be added.

Timing: Annual – September of each school year.
Already in progress; there is opportunity to enhance this document.

Tax Notice Stuffers

- We should consider partnering with local municipalities in an initiative that educates the public on where their education tax dollars go.
- Once a year when tax notices go out, we can include information that educates residents on the education component of their taxes.

Timing: Board to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.

Advertising

- As outlined in PLRD Advocacy Plan, the Board shall identify a key monthly message to be released to the press identifying a Divisional success or a concern/issue.
- Advertising should be targeted and give a specific message to ensure you are getting “bang for your buck”.
- Advertising in isolation is not a cost effective method of communicating; all advertising should be well planned and used in conjunction with other communications vehicles.
- Once a visual identity and graphic standards have been created, template ads will need to be created to ensure consistency with all other materials that exist.

Timing: Board to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.

Telephone Holds Message

- What do people hear when they call and are put on hold?
- Each school should know what their hold message currently says and should consider what that message says about the school and the Division.
- Hold messages provide a rare opportunity to communicate with stakeholders without interference; you have their undivided attention.
- Messages should be kept up-to-date, concise and can cover many topics. Consider using music preformed by a local school choir or band, or announcing upcoming arts, culture or sporting events.

Timing: Principals to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.
Administration to determine priority for Divisional Office - Year 1, 2, 3.

School Newsletters

- Utilize school webpage’s and post monthly newsletter on web.
- Some schools are already using email as an additional way to distribute monthly newsletters. As rural communities become more comfortable with technology and begin to embrace its capabilities this is an initiative more schools should consider.

Timing: Principals to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.

Conduct Exit Interviews

- When family members or employees leave your jurisdiction, take a few minutes to ask them what they thought of their experiences in your schools:
 - What is the most important thing we should be doing in Prairie Land Schools?
 - How do you usually get the most recent school/division news?
 - What is the best way for our school to get news to you?
- This information is invaluable in terms of informally evaluating how the Division is doing in terms of meeting or exceeding expectations and where communications gaps appear.

Timing: Board and Superintendent in conjunction with Principals to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.

Communicating with Diverse Families

- While it is not economically feasible to produce specialized publications that target students of minority background or significant non-English speaking, there are a number of ways we can reach out that is comfortable for them, helpful to our students and positive for the Division.
 - Go to the families - don't expect them to come to you. If you want to reach families that are hard to reach you must go to them, but do so with an invitation.
 - Be easily understood – If providing communications in that group's language is not viable summarize the essential points of important statements and provide access to a staff member who can give a complete translation.
- The list is endless, it's a matter of identifying who these minority groups are and what the most effective method(s) are in reaching them.

Timing: Already in progress; there is opportunity for enhancement.
Board to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.

There are several other communication tools that are targeted at our external audiences. If not mentioned in the Community Relations section of this plan, these tools are outlined in the PLRD Advocacy Plan.

Public & Community Relations

Public & Community Relations refers to our various publics and stakeholders other than residents: Municipal neighbors, business and community organizations, other government levels, and the general public. Communicating to this broad group requires organizational involvement.

Objective

Support the development and improvement of the Divisions image through ongoing research and communications that focuses on identifying demographics, psychographics, wants, needs and gaps in service delivery.

Strategy

Develop, implement and evaluate the appropriate tools and research devices that elicit feedback from residents and document and communicate research findings.

Tactics

School Council Meetings

- Provides direct interaction with parents.
- Opportunity for Trustees to build relationships and trust within the community.
- Consider annual review of the Trustee's role at School Council Meetings, including what information to share and why/why not.

Timing: Already in progress.
Board and Superintendent to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.

Community Meetings

- Allows the Board to work with people in various segments of our communities at the very beginning stages of decision-making rather than waiting to get input after the process is underway.
- This means working with people in the community to define the most important parts of the problem and to develop solutions.
- People want options presented to them and examined in a fair, unbiased way.

Timing: Already in progress on an as needed basis.
Board and Superintendent to determine when Community Meetings are required.

Annual Key Community Leaders' Meeting

- Builds relationships with key members of the community.
- Identifies specific areas of interest in education.
- Builds a widened version of a 'key communicators' network, which is critical to the future of public schools.

Timing: Already in progress; annual event.
Cross-promotion of findings from this meeting with other communications initiatives should be considered.

Meetings with local and provincial political leaders.

- As outlined in the PLRD Advocacy Plan.

Timing: Already in progress; there is opportunity to increase profile of these meetings with stakeholders.

Make Your Mark: School Board Elections 2007

- A two-part initiative first informing staff and residents of the upcoming Board Elections, the second part incorporating new elements into the Board's orientation of their roles as Public School Board Trustees.
- Part I - An advertising/public education campaign be developed for the upcoming 2007 School Board Elections.
 - This campaign would include a series of internal and external ads and feature articles that will outline the roles, responsibilities and commitment of a School Board Trustee, increasing the awareness of public education, and of the Board and its decisions.

- Part II – Evaluating, and in turn enhancing, the current Board Orientation process.
 - Research for the communications plan indicated that the Board Orientation process could be enhanced at the local level (reporting at Community Council Meetings, role of Board vs. Admin, how to effectively communicate with residents, role of media, etc.)
 - The Board of Trustees commits to ongoing media training workshops to be undertaken in the fall of each election year.
- Advocate to ASBA regarding the need for province-wide education sessions and information campaign on School Board Elections. This should be occurring during the year leading up to the elections.

Timing: Board and Superintendent to determine priority.

Establish a recognition program for parents and community members who volunteer or contribute to the school.

Timing: May already be in progress at the school level.
 There is a need to determine what each school is doing at the local level to identify opportunities for enhancement.
 Superintendent and Principals to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.

Use opportunities when parents and community are already in our schools to provide information.

- Have newsletter or calendars available at concerts and sporting events.
- Ensure public notice boards are up to date and visible near key areas of public use.

Timing: May already be in progress at the school level.
 There is a need to determine what each school is doing at the local level to identify opportunities for enhancement.
 Superintendent and Principals to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.

Periodically assess the views of the jurisdictions constituencies including parents, teachers, staff and students for the purpose of maintaining effective school/community relationships.

- Use annual Schollie survey to understand how these groups feel about your school and the Division as a whole.
- Look at the similarities and differences over a number of years and think about how to better reach each group in your community.
- Assure people that your schools are fulfilling the expectations dictated by their value systems and the policies and procedures the Division is governed by.

Timing: May already be in progress at the school level.
 There is a need to determine what each school is doing at the local level to identify opportunities for enhancement.
 Board, in conjunction with Superintendent and Principals, to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.

School Communications

Each PLRD School has developed its own communication style and processes. Almost all schools utilize a school newsletter, a website, school council meetings, concerts, media relations, and more.

Area of Focus: Keeping in mind the uniqueness of each school and the sense of pride and ownership that each staff has for its school, the Communications Consultant can provide as much assistance as possible to aid the schools in their communication efforts. The main areas of assistance may be:

- Increasing school presence in the media: assisting with media release writing and distribution, inviting the media to events, unique ways to attract media attention, etc.
- Communications planning: Maximizing the amount of attention to positive issues and events, as well as communicating regarding negative issues.

Timing: Board, Superintendent and Principals to determine priority – Year 1, 2, 3.

monitoring & evaluation:

When you are mindful of your communications culture and you are consciously operating with communications in the forefront, it will become natural for you to ask yourselves on an ongoing basis: "How are we doing?" You will look back at the elements of a strong communications culture and take stock. You will have the relationships in place to solicit feedback and reaction, and you will have the broad shoulders to correct your course and change direction if need be.

When implementing a working document such as a communications plan, it is important to have a built-in monitoring and an evaluation mechanism to allow ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of the activities and actions in meeting the described objectives and adjustments to plan as necessary.

Monitoring and evaluation should include:

- Monitoring input from *In Focus* feedback section.
- Media monitoring of media coverage.
- Conduct identical internal communications survey one year from now.
- Input received at public meetings (official feedback from evaluations and discussions during meeting)
 - I.e. Key Community Stakeholders Meeting
- Web site surveys and comment page.
- Staff and Trustee observations.
- Reduced complaints.
- Web site hits.
- Focus groups.
 - Occasionally hold informal focus groups. Randomly picking 6-8 people representing a given area of the Division and ask them questions that will help identify what kinds of school classes and activities will be of most interest to a certain group. This will help determine how best to communicate with various groups and how to involve them in your schools. This will also aid in determining what groups value in certain geographic areas of the Division.
- Continually ask yourself how you are communicating with various audiences and if that communications really fits the needs and interest of each group.
- Track questions phoned into schools or Division office. Look for trends.
- Attend school and community meetings whenever possible, not just to speak, but to listen as well.
- Watch local media for letters to editor and other opinions in the community.

where to go from here:

Where to go from here... What are the division's communications priorities in the upcoming year: Improving communication to residents? Improving perceptions of the division and the division office? Improving relationships with local media? We need to start small, choose a few key internal and external audiences and communications initiatives that will reach these audiences. We need to go through the proper planning process of outlining measurable goals and objectives and then evaluating these procedures. An effective communications program doesn't have to be big or complicated it just needs direction and a means of evaluation.

Before a budget can be established, priorities and tentative plans should be set for the upcoming year.

conclusion:

In the field of education a good communications program ensures that schools are identifying and serving society's needs, as well as letting the public know its demands are being met. A communications program that achieves this will build support for public schools and trust in the public education system. In the end, the goal of effective communications in education is to design and implement a comprehensive, structured communications program that will build public commitment and support for the education process.

Two-way communications are critical to the success of the organization. Corporate communications cannot accomplish the objectives identified without the support from all levels of the organization. We need to incorporate communications planning as an integral part of the planning of all significant and potential projects that could have implications for publics of the Division. This ensures that early involvement and/or communications with staff and residents is adequate and appropriate.

The level of commitment to communications by the dominant coalition often determines the success of communications. In the case of a school division, the dominant coalition would be the Board and Senior Administration. The communications position must have influence within the dominant coalition to help practice effective two-way communications. Lacking the opportunity to influence the strategic decision making of dominant coalitions, communications departments often execute less-than-excellent programs. Communicators are influential only to the degree that they actually influence decisions of dominant coalitions. It is therefore recommended that the communications role be brought in on the onset of discussions not after decisions have been made.

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